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Subject: BNA: California Shuts 33 More Oil Disposal Wells

California Shuts 33 More Oil Disposal Wells

Oct. 19 — California has shut down another 33 oil wastewater wells as part of its effort to bring the state's Class II underground injection well program into compliance with the federal Safe Drinking Water Act.

The state had allowed the wells to be drilled into geological formations close to potentially drinkable groundwater, the Department of Conservation said in an Oct. 16 written statement. With the closure of these injection wells, the state has shut down 56 wells atop aquifers not exempted by the Environmental Protection Agency for the disposal of oil extraction wastewater. Most of the latest 33 closures involved wells in Kern County, the center of the state's oil production operations. Among those, 21 were actively injecting wastewater, state officials said. Earlier this year, the department's Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources adopted emergency regulations that set a timetable to correct flaws the EPA found in California's Class II injection control program (80 DEN A-5, 4/27/15).

DOGGR on Oct. 1 announced plans to readopt the emergency regulations, which are set to expire Oct. 20.

“The regulations are working,” California's State Oil & Gas Supervisor Steven Bohlen said.

“We're on track to do what we set out to do in establishing an aggressive compliance scheduled with the U.S. EPA and State Water Resources Control Board.”

Regulators are reviewing data to determine whether injection wells in 11 geological zones may qualify for an EPA exemption from the Safe Drinking Water Act. Use of any of the wells in those zones, which the state historically treated as exempt, must cease by the end of 2016 unless an exemption is granted.

The use of all other non-exempt zones with water quality of less than 10,000 total dissolved solids must cease by Feb. 15, 2017, according to DOGGR's regulations and compliance plan.

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